

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /071 W

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R 131316Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8978

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652. N/A

TAGS: ELAB' PINT, UK

SUBJECT: TRADE UNION LEADER RESIGNS FROM THE COMMUNIST
PARTY

REF: (A) LONDON 18339; (B) LONDON 17822

SUMMARY - THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN LOST ITS
FIRST MAJOR TRADE UNION ACTIVIST IN SEVERAL YEARS WHEN
JIMMY REID, SCOTTISH TRADE UNION LEADER, DECIDED TO QUIT
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THE PARTY. AQ HE PUT IT, "I NO LONGER BELIEVE IT (THE

OARTY) IS GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION." WHETHER REID'S DECISION WILL TRIGGER OFF OTHER DEFECTIONS REMAINS TO BE SEEN, BUT IT IS AN IMPORTANT BLOW TO A PARTY WHICH HAS BEEN LOSING MEMBERSHIP (SEE REF A) AND HAS BEEN ON THE DEFENSIVE AGAINST OTHER FAR LEFT-WING GROUPS, SUCH AS THE TROTSKYITES. END SUMMARY.

1. REID BECAME A FIGURE OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE IN 1972 WHEN HE LED A "WORK-IN" AT AN UPPER CLYDE SHIPYARD. AT THAT TIME, HE WAS A GLASGOW COUNCILLOR AND HE LATER BECAME RECTOR OF GLASGOW UNIVERSITY. HOWEVER, HIS EFFORTS TO OBTAIN A SEAT IN THE PARLIAMENT WERE UNSUCCESSFUL DURING THE TWO 1974 GENERAL ELECTIONS. MORE RECENTLY, HE FAILED TO WIN A SEAT ON THE AUEW EXECUTIVE DURING ITS MOST RECENT AND CRUCIAL ELECTION IN WHICH MODERATES WON MAJOR VICTORIES (REF B).

2. REID'S DEASION TO LEAVE THE PARTY MUST HAVE COME AS A REAL SHOCK IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT HE HAD BEEN NAMED TO THE EXECUTIVE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY ONLY IN NOVEMBER OF LAST YEAR. IN HIS LETTER OF RESIGNATION TO THE SCOT-TISH SECRETARY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY, REID WROTE: "THE TRUTH IS THAT THE IDEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF THE 'BRITISH ROAD' (TO SOCIALISM) HAVE NEVER PERMEATED THE LIFE STYLE OR WORKING PATTERNS OF THE PARTY. THE RESULT HAS BEEN THAT OLD STYLES OF WORK, BUREAUCRATIC AND FORMALISTIC, HAVE PERSISTED." HE WENT ON TO CHARGE THAT "MEMBERS OF THE PARTY IN MY OPINION HAVE ACTED CONTRARY TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE WORKING CLASS." IN HIS RESPONSE TO THE RESIGNATION, THE PARTY'S GENERAL SECRETARY, GORDON MCLEN-NAN, EXPRESSED SURPRISE DECLARING THAT THE LAST CONGRESS OF THE PARTY HAD DECIDED TO OPEN UP A FULL DEBATE ON THE "BRITISH ROAD TO SOCIALISM." HE ALSO DENIED THAT THE PARTY IS A MONOLITH OR THAT IT CONDONED ANTI-WORKING CLASS ACTIONS BY MEMBERS AS REID CHARGED.

3. REID, IN AN INTERVIEW WITH ALAN JOHNSON. OF THE "EVENING STANDARD" (FEBRUARY 12) SAID HE WAS NOT "ENCOURAGING COMMUNISTS TO FOLLOW MY EXAMPLE, BUT I WOULD FIGHT

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TO ESTABLISH THE HUMANITY THAT IN MY BELIEF HAS TO BE
THE INSPIRATION FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIALISM." REID
ALSO SAID HE IS NOT PLANNING TO JOIN ANY OTHER PARTY,
NEITHER THE SCOTTISH NATIONALIST NOR THE SCOTTISH LABOR
PARTY.

4. COMMENT: WHETHER THE REID RESIGNATION TRIGGERS OFF
OTHER DEPARTURES FROM THE PARTY REMAINS TO BE SEEN. THESE
ARE NOT THE BEST OF TIMES FOR THE PARTY, HOWEVER, AND
HIS RESIGNATION IS CLEARLY AN IMPORTANT BLOW. IT DOES
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NOT NECESSARILY MEAN, OF COURSE, THAT REID WILL JOIN THE

ANTI-COMMUNIST RANKS. ARTHUR SCARGILL, FOR EXAMPLE, A CONTEMPORARY OF REID'S AND ONE WHO JOINED THE CP AT ABOUT THE SAME TIME, STILL FREQUENTLY TAKES A VERY LEFT-WING LINE AND CONTINUES TO IDENTIFY HIMSELF AS A "MARXIST." REID COULD FOLLOW A SIMILAR PATH. BUT HE ALSO -- IN TIME - COULD MOVE GRADUALLY TOWARDS THE CENTER. MOREOVER. APART FROM THE REPOPTED REASONS FOR THE RESIGNATION. THERE MAY BE OTHER PERHAPS DEEPER CAUSES WHICH MAY EMERGE LATER. THE COMMUNIST PARTY IS ALSO ON THE DEFENSIVE AGAINST MORE MILITANT LEFT-WING GROUPS SUCH AS THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS AND THE WORKERS REVOLUTIONARY PARTY.

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